



Investigating the Effect of Vocabulary Learning Strategies on Vocabulary Achievement among English Majors at Sudan Universities

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of vocabulary learning strategies on achievement of vocabulary among English major at Sudan Universities. The researchers adopted the experimental method to carry out this research. The study sample include 56 students both male and female represent the first-year undergraduate students within the academic year 2015 - 2016 at Al-Fashir University, Faculty of Arts. They have all been taken as one sample cluster and divided into control group and experimental group. To collect data the researchers designed pre and post test according to Schmitt's Vocabulary Level Test version 1 of 2000. The result obtained by (SPSS) program paired-sample T-test, which indicated that there was significance difference between pre and post test equal 3.04 at the sig. value equal 0.004 less than 0.05 and this is in line with what has been stated in the hypothesis.

Key words: *Determination strategies, Social strategies, Memory strategies, Cognitive strategies, Metacognitive strategies*

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تقصى تأثير استراتيجيات تعلم المفردات اللغوية على تحصيل المفردات وسط الطلاب المتخصصين في اللغة الانجليزية بالجامعات السودانية. اتبع الباحثون المنهج التجريبي للقيام بهذه الدراسة. تكونت عينة الدراسة من طلاب السنة الاولى تخصص لغة انجليزية بكلية الآداب بجامعة الفاشر وعددهم 56 طالباً وطالبة خلال العام الدراسي (2015 - 2016). تم اخذ العينة كلها كعينة عنقودية ثم تم تقسيم العينة الي مجموعتين، مجموعة ضابطة ومجموعه اختبارية. لجمع المعلومات صمم الباحثون اختبار قبلي وبعدي وفقاً لتصميم العالم اسكمت الاصدار الاول للعام 2000. تم تطبيق برنامج الحزم الاحصائية للعلوم الانسانية (SPSS) وعن طريق اختبار - ت للعينات المزدوجة حيث كانت قيمة ت تساوي 3.04 والقيمة المعنوية تساوي 0.004 وهي دالة احصائية تفيد ان هناك فروق ذات دلالة احصائية لصالح الاختبار البعدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات الثبات، الاجتماعيه، الذاكرة، التفكير، وما راء التفكير

INTRODUCTION:

Language learning styles and strategies are among the main factors that help determine how students learn a second or foreign language. A second language is a language studied in a setting where that language is the main vehicle of everyday communication and where abundant input exists in that language. A foreign language is a language studied in an environment where it is not the primary vehicle for daily interaction and where input in that language is restricted (Oxford, 2003: 1). In Sudan context English is

used as a foreign language where learners do not have enough opportunity to practice English. Sometimes practice takes place in class room environment only. This is why vocabulary learning is considered as an indispensable process for EFL learners to acquire proficiency and competence in target language.

Word power facilitates fluent speaking and effective writing. It substantiates both learners' acquisition of knowledge and production of knowledge. It enriches learners' integrated



language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (Ahmed, 2012: 71).

Language first occurs as words and then develops continuously according to the way people use it. "All languages have words. Language emerges first as words, both historically, and in terms of the way each of us learned our first and any subsequent languages. The coining of new words never stops, nor does the acquisition of words" (Thornbury 2002:1).

Words are considered the building blocks of any language and no language without words. It is assumed that "second language students need approximately 2000 words to maintain conversations, 3000 words families to read authentic texts, and as many as 10,000 words to comprehend challenging academic texts". (Schmitt, 2000: 78)

There are different types of strategies used by learners to cope with new vocabulary, but learners are not equally good at maximizing their strategic resources (McCarthy, 1990: 134).

Learners in general are divided into two categories; good learners those who are capable of making progress in second language vocabulary by using different strategies and those who are poor or under achievers who fail to cope with the second language acquisition, and each category has their own characteristics.

Rubin and Thompson suggest that 'good' or efficient learners tend to exhibit the following characteristics as they go about learning a second language.

Good learners:

- Find strategies for getting practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
- Learn to live with uncertainty and develop strategies for making sense of target language without resorting to understand every word.
- Use mnemonics (rhymes, word association, etc. to recall what has been learned)

- Use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language in mastering a second language.

- Make errors work.
- Let the context help them in comprehension.
- Learn to make intelligent guesses.
- Learn chunks of language as whole perform (beyond their competence)

(Rubin and Thompson, 1983 as cited in Nunan, 1991: 171)

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies are part of language learning strategies which in turn are part of general learning strategies. It is not easy to define what a strategy is, but to deserve attention from a teacher, a strategy would need to:

- Involve choice. That is, there are several strategies to choose from.
- Be complex. That is, there are several steps to learn.
- Require knowledge and benefit from training.
- Increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and vocabulary use.(Nation, 2001: 352).

One thing that all of the partners involved in the learning process (students, teachers, material, writers and researchers) can agree upon is that learning vocabulary is an essential part of mastering a second language. The importance of vocabulary is highlighted by the oft-repeated observation that learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books (Schmitt, 2010: 4).

In fact, it is difficult to decide where to draw the line between different strategies and their numerous variations. A number of attempts have been made to classify vocabulary learning strategies. O'Malley and Chamot propose three types of strategies: meta-cognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies. Oxford proposed two broad categories of strategies, direct and indirect. The former included memory,

cognitive, and compensation strategies while the latter included metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Gu and Johnson establishes two main dimensions of vocabulary learning strategies for their study, meta-cognitive regulation and cognitive strategies which covered 6 sub-categories: guessing, using a dictionary, note-taking, rehearsal, encoding, and activating, all of which were further sub-categorized. The total number of strategies in their study was 74 (Farouk, 2007: 5)

On the other hand, students may find it even easier to keep in mind three basic categories of strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective) with subsets of strategies within each (O'Malley & Chamot, 2001: 209).

Taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies intended to discuss in the current paper based on Oxford (1990) division of language learning strategies into direct (memory, cognitive, and compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, and social) strategies. Schmitt extracted vocabulary learning strategies from Oxford's taxonomy of general learning strategies and their categorisation into Social (involving cooperation with others), Cognitive (referring to language manipulation or transformation), Metacognitive (used to control the learning process) and Memory strategies (involving relating the new word with some previously learned knowledge)

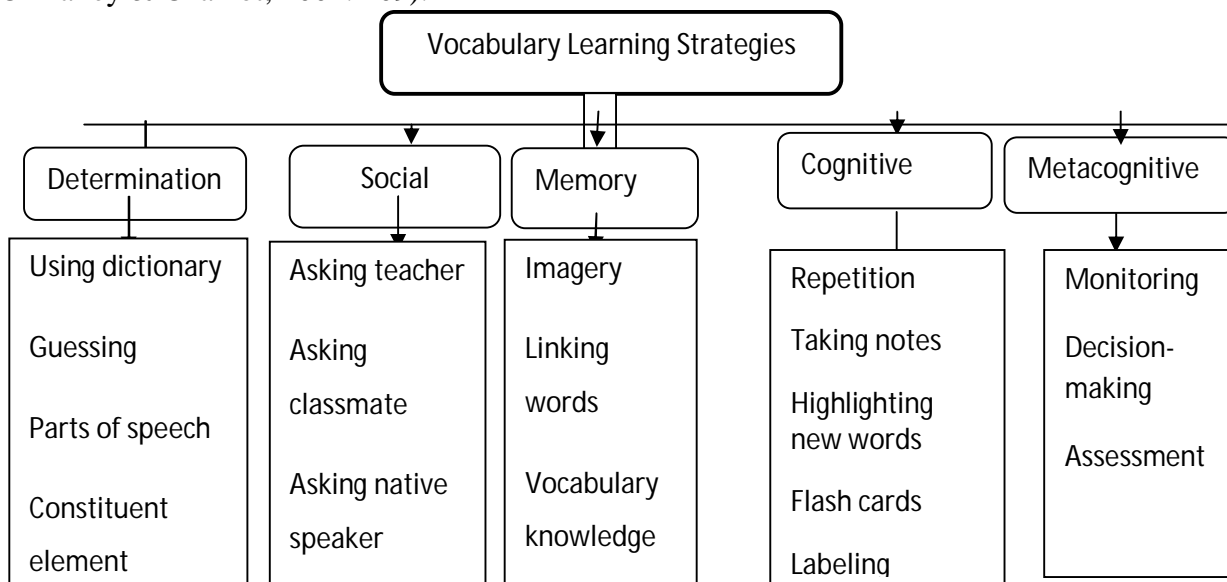


Figure (1) Classification of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (Source original)

Determination Strategies

Determination or discovery strategy involves determination and social strategies; it helps learners to determine the meaning of new words when encountered for the first time. Determination Strategies facilitate gaining knowledge of a new word from the first four options: (i) guessing from an L1 cognate, (ii) guessing from context, (iii) using reference

materials, or (iv) asking someone else (Schmitt, 2000: 135).

Social Strategies

Social strategies refer to interaction with other people to improve language learning. One can ask teachers or classmates for information about a new word and they can answer in a number of ways (synonyms, translations, etc.). One can also study and consolidate vocabulary



knowledge with other people although some students especially Japanese prefer to study individually (Schmitt, 2000: 135).

Asking questions like “What do these words have in common? How are they different?” When studying a word list. Asking questions will test comprehension of the material. It also puts the information into words, which will help remembering what have been learned. This can be especially helpful when learning definitions (Chesla, 2004: 11).

Teachers are often in this position, and they can be asked to give help in a variety of ways: giving the L1 translation if they know it, giving a synonym, giving a definition by paraphrase, using the new word in a sentence, or any combination of these. L1 translations have the advantage of being fast, easily understood by students, and make possible the transfer of all the knowledge a student has of the L1 word (collocations, associations, etc.) onto the L2 equivalent (Martin, 1984: 1).

The disadvantages are that the teacher must know the learners' mother tongue, and that most translation pairs are not exact equivalents, so that some erroneous knowledge may be transferred. Likewise, though synonyms have similar meanings, students need to know collocational, stylistic, and syntactic differences in order to use them effectively in a productive mode (ibid).

Memory Strategies

Memory strategies are classified into rehearsal and encoding categories. Repetition, memorizing word lists and imitating other people's pronunciation of words are examples of rehearsal strategies. Encoding strategies encompass such strategies as association, imagery, visual, auditory, semantic, and contextual encoding as well as word-structure (Farouk, 2007: 5).

Memory strategies involve relating the word with some previously learned knowledge by

using some form of imagery or grouping. Most Memory Strategies (traditionally known as mnemonics) involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping (Schmitt, 2000: 309)

Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies include guessing strategies, skillful use of dictionaries and note-taking strategies. Cognitive strategies include repetition and using mechanical means such as word lists, flash cards, and vocabulary notebooks to study words. Cognitive Strategies in this taxonomy are similar to Memory Strategies, but are not focused so specifically on manipulative mental processing; they include repetition and using mechanical means to study vocabulary. Written and verbal repetition, repeatedly writing or saying a word over and over again, are common strategies in many parts of the world (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 8).

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition has been used to refer to knowledge about cognition or the regulation of cognition. Knowledge about cognition may include applying thoughts about the cognitive operations of oneself or others, while regulation of cognition includes planning, monitoring, and evaluating a learning or problem-solving activity. Examples of metacognitive strategies are directed attention, or consciously directing one's own attention to the learning task, and self-evaluation, or appraising the successes and difficulties in one's own learning efforts (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 99).

Metacognitive strategies consist of selective attention and self-initiation strategies. Learners who use selective attention strategies recognize the relative importance of words they can learn for their comprehension. Learners employing self-initiation strategies use a variety of means to make the meaning of vocabulary items clear (Farouk, 2007: 4).



Metacognitive strategies in Schmitt's taxonomy help learners to control and evaluate their own learning, by having an overview of the learning process in general as such, they are generally broad strategies, concerned with more efficient learning. Studies researching the number of exposures necessary to learn a word have results ranging from 5 to 16 or more (Nation, 1990: 43-45).

Material and Methodology

First, the researcher selected (31) students for pilot study to find out the validity and reliability of the test. The result showed that the test was reliable based on SPSS analysis, Cronbach's α (.868) which indicated that the test was consistent. Second, the pretest was administered before the start of the intended course (Vocabulary Building) to find out their actual level in vocabulary, and then the students exposed to different vocabulary learning strategies (determination, social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive) proposed by Schmitt in (1997). The post test administered after three months – the duration of the semester – in which the students have been enlightened and trained well on the use of the strategies of learning vocabulary. Third, the course started at September (2015) and lasted for three months. Within this period the students have completed fifty units from the intended textbook and have been taught the strategies of vocabulary learning and how to apply them. Fourth, to measure students' vocabulary level, the researcher

adopted Vocabulary Level Test (VLT) version 1 based on Schmitt (2000).

Subjects

The subjects were English Majors, first year students, their levels of English language ability were pre-intermediate to intermediate levels. 80 students were selected as one sample cluster intended to join the same course prescribed in semester one but with different vocabulary learning strategies. The purpose of this study is to compare the performance of the subjects before and after the study of vocabulary learning strategies. The subjects have been extracted from ninety students based on condition of taking full attendance lectures, in both the pretest and posttest. So, they finally represent the sample of the study.

Instrumentation

The data of the study was collected from the subjects by administrating pre-and-post test based on Schmitt's (2000) Vocabulary Level Test: version 1. The test was administered to the same students but the number of the participants reduced from 80 participants to 56 due to absence of some students during the administration of the post test.

Study Question: Is there any improvement in vocabulary among first-year undergraduate students after being exposed to vocabulary learning strategies?

Study Hypothesis: First-year undergraduate students made progress in vocabulary knowledge after being exposed to vocabulary learning strategies.

Table 1 demonstrated the Paired sample correlation t. test

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Control	57	24.88	10.573	3.04	56	0.004
Experimental	57	31.56	12.656			

Table 1 showed that there are significant different between the means of the degree of the control group and experimental group, it has been noticed that the mean of the experimental

group 31.56 is greater than the mean of the control group 24.87 and showed significant different between the degree of control group and experimental group at T. test equal 3.04at



the sig. value equal 0.004 less than 0.05 and this is in line with what has been stated in the hypothesis.

It is also reported that the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test, when the two groups are compared, it seems clear that those who participated in the VLSs program knew significantly more vocabulary than those who only took the course without VLSs. The mean score for the experimental group (M= 31.56, SD= 12.656) was greater than the control groups' post-test score (M= 24.88, SD= 10.573). As can be seen in the table above, for the experimental group, the difference was statistically significant; $t(57) = 3.04, p < 0.004$.

The respondents seemed to have benefited from the prerequisite study in which they had been exposed to vocabulary learning strategies in learning new vocabulary items and the students could apply these strategies effectively as it has been noticed from their academic performance shown in the results of the post test. This result seems to support Tassana-ngam's (2004) who examined the effect of training in five vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) on Thai university students in an L2 normal heterogeneous classroom. Students showed an increased awareness of need to select a suitable vocabulary learning strategy to help remember different types of words. Similarly, Banisaeid (2013) conducted a research paper to compare the effect of memory and cognitive strategies training on vocabulary learning. Finding suggests that memory strategies training and cognitive strategy training respectively enhance memory and cognitive strategy uses. Furthermore, Zahedi and Abdi (2012) compared two vocabulary learning strategies; these were imagery strategy with direct translation. Findings showed that the experimental group

outperformed the control group. This result seems to match with the current results in that both studies reflect the effects of vocabulary learning instructions on the performance of the subjects.

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